**Lobelia inflata**  
[low-BEE-lee-uh in-FLAY-tuh]

**Family:** Campanulaceae

**Names:** asthma weed, bladder pod, bladder-podded lobelia, Indian Tobacco, Indian tobacco lobelia, obelia, tobacco lobelia, emetic herb, Emetic Weed, field lobelia, Puke Weed, Gagroot, Wild Tobacco, Vomitwort, Eyebright

**Description:** Erect, hairy herb with angled stems that branch near the top. Height is 3 feet and width is 1 foot. Flowers are blue-violet to white and very small (1/4 inch long). Leaves are elongated ovals, serrated around the edges, 2½ inches long. The seed capsules resemble an inflated bladder (thus its name) filled with tiny, rough, black, oily seeds. It blooms June to September. The milky juice is very poisonous to livestock. The whole plant is active and the root is supposed to be more energetic, medicinally, than any other part of the plant. Its solvent is water, alcohol, apple cider vinegar.

**Cultivation:** Grows by roadsides and in neglected areas. An annual it germinates in 2-3 weeks. Needs light, preferably sunlight, to germinate. Sow on the surface spacing 8-12 inches. Soil temperature 70-75°F. Soil should be rich, cool, moist with a pH of 5-7. Full sun in colder climates otherwise, partial shade. Tap the seed down into premoistened soil and mulch well to protect it in cold climates. Higher yields of active constituents are obtained from plants grown in full sunlight. An acre may produce a thousand to 1700 pounds of dried herb. Irrigation increases the harvest weight of field-grown plants. Under a planting scheme that would hold 21,780 plants per acre (planted on one-foot centers in rows spaced two feet apart), a yield of 1700 pounds per acre was obtained. The weight of plants was reduced by 30% after drying. Harvest the whole herb while still in flower after a few seed capsules develop. The aerial parts are harvested in early autumn, when the seed capsules are most numerous and are carefully dried in the shade and then preserved. Dry at temperatures of 50-60°F. The seeds are so small that they can be mixed with fine sand in the ratio of 1-50, and then planted for 50-60 days in the greenhouse. Much care should be taken when watering, as the fine mixture and small seeds can be washed away. They can also be burned out if threatened by too much heat or too much sun.
Seedlings must be 3-4 in high with five to six well-developed leaves before transplanting.

**History:** The first lobelias were brought to Europe and named in honor of the 16th century Flemish botanist Matthias de L’Obel, physician and botanist to James I. The specific species (inflata) refers to the fruit which is hollow and distended. Strongly emetic, it induced such vomiting and sweating that it was known as gag root and purge weed. The Native Americans used the root and plant for syphilis and for expelling or destroying intestinal worms. They also smoked it for its calming effect. The Shoshones made a tea of Lobelia for use as an emetic and physic. Health Canada has classified lobelia as a drug or poison and prohibits its sale and use.

The Indian shamans of North America used powdered lobelia to make love potions. It was also used to keep thunderstorms away: the shamans would throw the powder into the air in the direction of the lightning. Lobelia floral elixir stimulates inner strength, restores tranquility and balances the male libido.

**Constituents:** Over 14 alkaloids. Pyridine alkaloids (principally lobeline, lobelanidine, lobelic acid, lobelanine, and isolobinine); carboxylic acids; glycoside (lobelacrin); essential oil (labelianin), chelidonic acid. The seeds contain lobelinein.

**Properties:** respiratory stimulant; antispasmodic; expectorant; induces vomiting; increases sweating

**Medicinal Uses:** Lobelia was a traditional Native American remedy and its use was later championed by the American herbalist Samuel Thomson (1769-1843), who made the herb the mainstay of his therapeutic system. He mainly used it to induce vomiting. It was promoted by Jethro Kloss and later by Dr. John Christopher. A powerful antispasmodic and respiratory stimulant, lobelia is valuable for asthma, especially bronchial asthma, and chronic bronchitis. It relaxes the muscles of the smaller bronchial tubes, thus opening the airways, stimulating breathing, and promoting the coughing up of phlegm. In the Western tradition, lobelia has always been combined with cayenne, its hot stimulant action helping to push blood into areas that lobelia has relaxed. Lobelia is often most effective when the infusion or diluted tincture is applied externally. It relaxes muscles, particularly smooth muscle, which makes it useful for sprains, and back problems where muscle tension is a key factor. Combined with cayenne, lobelia has been used as a chest and sinus rub. Due to its chemical similarity to nicotine, lobelia is employed by herbalists to help patients give up smoking. Lobeline sulphate has been part of commercial over-the-counter antismoking lozenges. It seems to replace physical addiction to nicotine without its addictive effects. The Native Americans smoked it like tobacco for respiratory problems and it gained the name Indian tobacco. Both drinking the tea and smoking lobelia, usually with other herbs to modify its intense reaction, have been employed to treat asthma, bronchitis and whooping cough. Plasters and liniments for sprains, muscle spasms, and insect bites and poultices for breast cancer sometimes contain lobelia.

**ENERGETICS:** bitter, neutral
**MERIDIANS/ORGANS AFFECTED:** liver, lungs, heart, small intestine
**REMEDIES:**

- **Antispasmodic Tincture:**
  1 oz lobelia seed, 1 oz skullcap, 1 oz skunk cabbage root, 1 oz myrrh; 1 oz black cohosh; 1/2 oz cayenne. Infuse in one quart of brandy for one week.

- **Dr Christopher’s B&B tincture**
  Equal parts blue vervain, black cohosh, blue cohosh, skullcap, lobelia. Take 4 oz of this mixture and make a tincture in one quart of alcohol. Recommended for hiccups, ear infections and medulla oblongata damage especially when caused by abuse of hallucinogenic drugs. Also useful for asthma, whooping cough and chorea.

- **Clinical Respiratory Formula:**
  3 parts ephedra; 1 part mullein leaf; 1 part goldenseal root; 1 part coltsfoot leaf; 1 part
marshmallow root; 1 part comfrey leaf; 1 part lobelia herb; 1 part cayenne pepper. Useful for dilating bronchial tubes while cleansing mucus from the bronchi, lungs and sinuses. Also for airborne allergies, sinus congestion and lung problems.

For Arthritis, rheumatism and stiff joints:
Mix together 2 ounces mullein herb, 1 teaspoon of cayenne pepper and 1/2 oz lobelia. Add to 2 quarts of cider vinegar. Simmer for 30 minutes. Strain. To use, reheat and dip cloth into mixture and use as a compress over the affected areas.

Cough Syrup
Put 1 tablespoon elecampane, 3 Tbsp boneset, 1 Tbsp coltsfoot, 1 Tbsp Irish Moss and 1 Tbsp lobelia in a pint of water. Boil down to half the liquid. Strain well and add 1 pint of honey. Refrigerate and take by the tablespoon as needed for cough.

SOS Tincture (in case of emergency during an angina or asthma attack, broncho-spasms, anxiety attack or hysteria: use a very small dose of 3-5 drops diluted in a little water. It will take between 5 and 10 minutes to take effect once swallowed. Do not exceed 3 well-spaced doses over the course of the same day.
1 tsp fresh lobelia flower capsules, 1 tsp cayenne pepper, 4/5 cup of apple cider vinegar. Crush all the plants using a mortar or food processor. Cover with vinegar in a glass jar. Macerate for 1 month away from light and stir regularly. Carefully strain.

Homeopathic:
Tincture of fresh plant; trituratoin of leaves only for alcoholism, alopecia, amenorrhoea, angina pectoris, asthma, cardialgia, cough, croup, deafness, debility, diarrhea, dysmenorrhea, dyspepsia, emphysema, faintness, gallstones, gastralgia, hemorrhoidal discharge, hay asthma, heart (affections of), hysteria, meningaeal headaches, Miller's asthma, morning sickness, hangovers, morphia habit, palpitation, pleurisy, psoriasis, rigid as seborrhea, pain in shoulders, effects of tea, stricture of urethra, serious discharge from vagina, vomiting in pregnancy, wens, whooping cough.

Toxicity: The herb is toxic, so should only be used in minute doses by qualified professionals. Overdoses can be fatal. Large doses cause vomiting, convulsions, respiratory failure, and depression of motor functions in the brain and nervous system. The dose necessary to produce the desired results varies greatly from patient to patient. The action is sometimes too short to be effective. It is on the FDA's restricted list, but the administration allows it in pills to stop smoking.


References:
Indian Herbalogy of North America, Alma R. Hutchens, Merco, 1973

Resources:
Companion Plants, www.companionplants.com
plants
Crimson Sage, http://www.crimson-sage.com
Plants

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